

## **FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** July 13, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Shoulder Season Performance Criteria

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Informational

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 45 minutes

2016 will mark the first year of “Shoulder Seasons” in Montana. A shoulder season is a firearms season that occurs outside the 5-week general firearms season. The seasons focus on **antlerless elk** harvest on **private land** and are not intended to replace or reduce harvest during the existing general archery and 5-week general firearms season. In order for shoulder season to be effective, everyone must work together – FWP, landowners and sportsmen. Shoulder seasons will take place in 43 hunting districts and, depending on the district, hunters will be able to use their general elk license or elk B License.

FWP will have a shoulder season information web page up in July that will be previewed with the commission. The page will be user-friendly and easy to navigate. It will include general information, history, guidelines, fundamental objectives and performance criteria, information for hunters, information for landowners, a place for the 2016-17 shoulder season performance as far as realized harvest against necessary harvest for those hunting districts with shoulder seasons, and an evaluation of the 2015 “Pilot Project”.

In 2015 FWP did a “Pilot Project” shoulder season in five Region 4 hunting districts (HD). The results highlight two things: 1) shoulder seasons can be successful at harvesting elk, and 2) harvest during shoulder seasons can only be accomplished if landowners cooperate. In HDs 445, 446, 449 and 452 where there was good landowner participation there was very good harvest of bull and antlerless elk during the archery and general seasons and 611 antlerless elk taken during the shoulder season. Antlerless harvest during the shoulder season increased the archery and general season harvest by 72% (Table 1). In addition to a good bull harvest, the total all-seasons-combined harvest of cow elk was about twice what it had been in any of the previous five years. In HD 410, where there was less landowner participation, there were only 31 cows taken during the late shoulder season compared to 444 during the archery and general season.

**Table 1.** Montana 2015 Shoulder Season "Pilot Project" Performance Criteria Evaluation

Hunting District(s)	Harvest Criteria - Harvest needed and harvest realized.							
	Archery and General Seasons <sup>a</sup>				All Seasons Combined <sup>b</sup>			
	Adult Cows		Adult Bulls		Adult Cows		Bulls, Cows & Calves	
	Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized	Needed	Realized
410	182	<b>444</b>	121	<b>281</b>	357	<b>475</b>	595	<b>776</b>
445/455	232	<b>194</b>	155	<b>159</b>	455	<b>295</b>	758	<b>492</b>
446	134	<b>341</b>	89	<b>256</b>	263	<b>649</b>	438	<b>1002</b>
449/452	131	<b>191</b>	87	<b>206</b>	256	<b>308</b>	427	<b>534</b>

<sup>a</sup>Harvest during the archery and general seasons must be ≥51% of recruitment for both bulls and cows

<sup>b</sup>Harvest during all seasons combined (archery, general and shoulder seasons) must be a combined harvest of bulls, cows and calves ≥100% of recruitment of all elk.

This summer and fall FWP will do a public outreach campaign to get the word out to landowners and sportsmen about the new shoulder seasons for 2016. This will include newspaper, radio, TV, and social media as well as letters to all landowners with 160 acres or more (80 acres in R1) in places where shoulder seasons will occur.